

## MISGUIDING REASON

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shapes and qualities with which plants and animals are endowed, and we all feel gratified when it is shown, for instance, that an animal's particular colour may assist it in evading danger or in attracting a mate. But it must be confessed that these explanations very often assume that birds and beasts are easily deceived by superficial resemblances, and that females are pleased by eccentricities of appearance which, when they first developed, would simply be deformities. In the vast majority of cases peculiarities of shape and colour are quite inexplicable on utilitarian grounds, and appear to be merely the fruits of an impulse for change. If harmful, they would generally be weeded out in the struggle for existence, which seems, however, to have spared some of them, as, for instance, the monstrous beak of the horn-bill. But, if harmless, they would remain to testify to the irresponsible activity of the impulse to vary.

An analysis of human character discloses similar anomalies. There are instincts that are useful in the struggle for life: there are instincts that are useless from this point of view: there are others that are harmful, such as the lust for cruelty, the passion for intoxicants. If we turn from ourselves to the course of the world around us, we find much that is beautiful, much that is repellent: there are smiling pastures, there are

desolate wildernesses : in some years  
the earth  
brings forth her increase. in others  
millions of its  
inhabitants are starved by famine.  
Life. the most  
precious of treasures, is poured out  
wastefully—  
often with bitter dreads of misery. The  
mere fact  
that animals eat one another shocks  
our sense of  
morality and kindness. If there be a  
purpose in  
the course of Nature. we may hardly  
conclude that  
it is in accord with our notions of  
justice or mercy.